



ABSTRACT AND BIOGRAPHY

Thinking on the Job: Distractions, Multitasking and the Erosion of Attention

The most precious resource we have is our time and attention, both of which have fixed limits. By attempting to do too many things we become less effective. By attempting to multitask we take longer to do things and we do them poorly. By attending to unimportant distractions we dilute the quality of our thinking. All of these erode our attention and have negative impacts on performance, risk and safety.

What can we do to ensure we are applying undivided time and attention to the most important things while still responding to many of the other demands? Though we cannot increase the amount of time or attention we each have available, we can improve the quality of both by employing strategies to minimize distractions and focus our minds.

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William H. Gerstenmaier is the Associate Administrator for Space Operations. In this position, Gerstenmaier directs NASA's human exploration of space. He also has programmatic oversight for the international space station, space shuttle, space communications and space launch vehicles.

Image left: William H. Gerstenmaier, NASA Associate Administrator for Space Operations. Photo credit: NASA/Bill Ingalls.

Formerly Gerstenmaier was the program manager of the International Space Station Office at NASA's Johnson Space Center in Houston, and was responsible for the overall management, development, integration, and operation of the International Space Station.

In 1977, Gerstenmaier began his NASA career at the Glenn Research Center in Cleveland, Ohio, performing aeronautical research. He was involved with the wind tunnel tests that were used to develop the calibration curves for the air data probes used during entry on the space shuttle.

Beginning in 1988, Gerstenmaier headed the Orbital Maneuvering Vehicle (OMV) Operations Office, Systems Division at Johnson Space Center, where he was responsible for all aspects of OMV operations. Subsequently, he headed Space Shuttle/Space Station Freedom Assembly Operations Office, Operations Division and was Chief, Projects and Facilities Branch, Flight Design and Dynamics Division.

Gerstenmaier also served as Shuttle/Mir Program Operations Manager from 1995 to 1997. During this time he was the primary liaison to the Russian Space Agency for operational issues and negotiated all protocols used in support of operations during the



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Shuttle/Mir missions. In addition, he supported NASA 2 operations from Russia, January-September 1996.

In 1998, Gerstenmaier became manager of Space Shuttle Program Integration, where he was responsible for the overall management, integration, and operations. In December 2000, he was named deputy manager of the International Space Station Program.

Gerstenmaier received a bachelor of science in aeronautical engineering from Purdue University in 1977 and a master of science degree in mechanical engineering from the University of Toledo in 1981. In 1992 and 1993, he completed course work for a doctorate in dynamics and control with emphasis in propulsion at Purdue University.

Gerstenmaier is the recipient of numerous awards, including three NASA Certificates of Commendation, two NASA Exceptional Service Medals, a Senior NASA Outstanding Leadership Medal, and the Presidential Rank Award for Meritorious Executives. He also was honored with an Outstanding Aerospace Engineer Award from Purdue University. Additionally, he was twice honored by Aviation Week and Space for Outstanding Achievement in the Field of Space.

He is married to the former Marsha Ann Johnson. They have two children.